

“What do you think about taking piano lessons?”

Marcus Wright may not remember his father’s exact words. You will have to forgive him because he was 9 years old when his father, James Wright Sr., asked him what he thought at the time was an innocent question.

It turns out that question proved to be Wright’s gateway to the life-changing world of music.

A journey that started with learning to play piano and performing in Pastor Wright’s church stretched to other instruments until Marcus was able to play nearly everything – drums, trumpet, trombone, tuba, clarinet, flute, lead guitar, organ, bass guitar and more.

“I think what really played a role was my roots in the church,” Wright said when asked what drew him to a career in music. “Hearing the music, there was just something about it. I didn’t participate at 5 and 6 and 7 years old, but I listened and I loved the beat and I was intrigued by it and I said to myself, ‘Maybe this is something I want to do.’ ”

Wright’s passion for music still burns after more than 20 years as a teacher. Now in his second stint as band director at West Lowndes High School, Wright hopes his students see how much he enjoys what he does and how he wound up “messing around” with music and falling in love with it.

“Without a shadow of a doubt it was a calling,” Wright said. “Music is just a part of my life. It is a part of who I am. I had to follow the music path.”

Wright graduated from the University of Alabama in 2002 with a degree in music education. He said his father and his mother, Luberta,

nurtured his love for music through participation in the church. Wright first taught in Alabama before he worked at West Lowndes High from 2006-11. He returned to Alabama for several years before finding his way back to Lowndes County, where he has been since 2018.

In addition to teaching beginner band for sixth-graders at West Lowndes Elementary School, Wright teaches junior high and high school band. Wright has 17 students in sixth-grade program and about 30 in the junior high group and about another 30 in the high school band. Wright said each one is important because the chain breaks if one person is missing.

“Mr. Wright has done a remarkable job as band director for West Lowndes High School,” West Lowndes High Principal Antonio Magee said. “His love for music and the students is evident throughout the community. Mr. Wright’s passion for music has a lasting impact on the lives of the students.”

Wright said he enjoys visiting with former students who tell him how much music has impacted their lives. He said he tries to instill discipline, life skills, organization and motivation to the students as part of their high school experience.

“Seeing the results of them being motivated by me just speaks volumes,” Wright said. “When I hear co-workers or people in the community tell me how much the kids love band and they won’t put their instruments down when they’re home, I just want to motivate them. I am just myself. I try to give it all I have got, and, hopefully, that love, that passion, the drive I have, reaches the kids.”

Wright said being passionate about what you do is an essential part of work. That passion for music is ultimately why he decided to give up a basketball scholarship at Beville State Community College in Fayette,

Alabama, after one semester and turn toward a career in music. He said teaching music is all he knows how to do, and he hopes his life experiences can help his students see that they, too, can find a wonderful career in music.

That journey may start with a simple question from a parent. If the opportunity presents itself, Wright encourages his students to give music a chance because he is a perfect example of the rewards someone can reap from a lifelong love of music.

“My love for music spills over,” Wright said. “I try to make it where it gravitates to the kids and it gets into them, and then it gets to the next kid and the next kid. When I have kids talking about it and they have the passion for it, they will talk to their friends and then those kids will come to me and say, ‘Mr. Wright, I want to be in the band.’ Once you get it into the kids, it is going to spread. It may be one by one, but eventually it is going to consume the entire group.”